

Anchored during Times of Grief (Lesson 6)

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Words to Anchor Your Soul

“The LORD’s many kindnesses never cease,
for his great compassion never comes to an end.
They are renewed every morning;
Your faithfulness is abundant!
I said to myself, ‘The LORD is the portion of my inheritance;
Therefore, I will put my hope in him.’”

[Lamentations 3:22-24](#) (NET)

Introduction

Most of us have experienced grief in some form: some have dealt with death; others with divorce; many with loss of health or friends. Loss involves grief, which is the natural response. As I have watched Christians deal with various losses over the years, it seems that too often we do not encourage grief, but instead we praise those who cover their feelings of sorrow. We seem to think that is a measure of their faith. We look at others and say, “She is doing so well. She is so strong!” and make it difficult for her to be real. Then, when we deal with it ourselves, we are afraid to show our grief, thinking we lack faith. As a result, often the storm of loss and grief causes many believers to drift away from God.

The *New Illustrated Bible Commentary* says this about Lamentations: “Rather than explaining away pain, the book helps us face pain. By avoiding cheery clichés, the Book of Lamentations provides companionship for those who are suffering and plants seeds of hope for rebuilding after the suffering is over.”²³

This week we meet someone grieving over the loss of his nation, his place of worship, and most of his people. Hopefully, studying this book will help anchor us by helping us grieve well ourselves when we encounter loss.

Background of Lamentations

For the past five weeks we have studied prophets who preached before the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of the people of the southern kingdom of Judah. Most of them prophesied of these events but did not live to see them. In 586 B.C., the city and the temple were destroyed by the Babylonians. The book of Lamentations is the author’s outpouring of grief and sorrow because of those experiences.

Although the author is not named in the book, tradition says that the prophet Jeremiah wrote it, and we know that he did experience the destruction firsthand. The Septuagint, the Greek

translation of the Hebrew text, attributes it to Jeremiah. On the other hand, the arrangement of the Hebrew Bible suggests that someone else wrote it.²⁴

The structure of the book involves five poems, of which the first four are written in an acrostic form. That means that each stanza of each of those poems begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. (If they were written in English, the first stanza would begin with “A”, the second with “B”, and so on.) Each of the first four poems has twenty-two stanzas, and the fifth has twenty-two verses but not in acrostic form.²⁵ Not all modern English translations make this clear by looking at the text. If that is true of your Bible, you may want to read it in the NET Bible so that you can better see the structure.²⁶

Day One Study

Read [Jeremiah 52:1-16](#), Jeremiah’s account of the destruction of Jerusalem.

1. Describe the events that accompanied the fall of Jerusalem.

Diamonds in the Word: Make a book chart of Lamentations, or read [Deut. 28](#), in which Moses warned the children of Israel of the consequences of failing to ally their lives with God’s. Parallel his warnings with what you read in [Jeremiah 52](#) and Lamentations.

Read [Lamentations 1](#), the first of the five poems. Note that the poem includes words that come from the prophet himself and those that suggest that the city is speaking.

2. Consider the poetic language in [Lamentations 1](#) and the straightforward account you read in [Jeremiah 52](#). How does the poetry affect your feelings differently than the prose? What does [Lam. 1](#) add to your description of the destruction in question #1?
3. Poetic language paints a visual picture for us. What visual picture of what happened to Jerusalem hits you hardest? Why?
4. *Sharing question:* With which picture of grief and sorrow do you most identify? Why?
5. *Responding to God:* Write a prayer that you will never so rebel against God and his desire for your best that he is forced to bring disaster into your life as the only way to get through to you. Pray for a soft heart, open to the voice of His Spirit.

Day Two Study

Read [Lamentations 2](#).

6. The pictures of the siege and the effects on the people are difficult to read. Which picture in this chapter is most sad and difficult for you as you think about what happened to these people?

7. The prophets (these called themselves prophets of Yahweh, the God of Israel) had falsely prophesied, according to [Lam. 2:14](#). Read the following passages, and write down your insights into how the prophets were misleading the people.

a. [Micah 3:5-8](#) (You read it a couple of weeks ago.)

b. [Jeremiah 23:16-22](#)

Diamonds in the Word: Find other references in your Bible to prophets who are falsely speaking, claiming to speak for God. If you did the *Diamonds in the Word* a few weeks back, you already looked at [2 Peter 2](#). Use your concordance to find others. You may use the word prophet(s), false, or even speak. What additional things do you learn?

The grief expressed by the author involved a recognition that the people went forward in defiance of God, bringing these terrible things on themselves.

8. *Sharing question:* When you see loss and hardship because of consequences that someone has brought on herself, do you grieve over what she suffers or do you harden your heart because the person “deserves it”? What do you learn from the author of Lamentations about that?

9. *Responding to God:* Write a prayer or a poem expressing grief over the loss with which someone you know is dealing right now. If you cannot feel that grief, pray for God’s heart in the matter. Write a note to the person sharing your encouragement.

Day Three Study

Read [Lamentations 3:1-20](#), which describes the author’s personal grief over the city and its inhabitants. Remember that he was using figurative language and may not have physically experienced all of the things he mentioned, but they may simply describe how he felt.

10. Which picture of the author’s grief most intensely affects you? Why?

Diamonds in the Word: Read [John 11](#), considering it from the perspective of grief. What do you learn?

Read [Lamentations 3:19-33](#).

In [Lam. 3:21](#), the author’s feelings and thoughts seem to change. *The New Illustrated Commentary* calls 3:22-24 “the beacon of light in the midst of disintegration.”²⁷ The author moves here from grief and depression to hope. These are this week’s *Words to Anchor Your Soul*. Memorize them so they can light your way when you face painful and sorrowful situations.

11. *Sharing question:* Why might [Lam. 3:22-24](#) anchor you if you faced this kind of situation?

12. Compare [Lam. 3:28-30](#) with [Heb. 12:7-13](#). What can you learn about dealing with times of discipline from God (like these times were)?

13. *Sharing question:* Have you ever dealt with a time when God made it clear that He was bringing discipline into your life to get you to turn around to Him? If so, describe it and how you dealt with it.

Read [Lamentations 3:34-66](#).

14. The author based much of what he said on the character of God. What did he reveal here about who God is and what He is like? What difference did it seem to make to him?

15. *Sharing question:* Describe a time in your life when you dealt with depression or grief. How long did it last? How did God work in your life through it?

16. *Responding to God:* Pray through [Lam. 3:22-33](#) for yourself or someone dealing with a time of grief or difficulty. Write down your thoughts below.

Day Four Study

Read [Lamentations 4](#), which provides more visual pictures of what befell Jerusalem.

17. What details about the situation in Jerusalem did the author add here to what he said in the previous chapters?

Diamonds in the Word: Read in your Bible resources about the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

18. Wrong thinking can destroy us by causing us to act wrongly. What deceptive thinking did the author mention that misled the people of Jerusalem into believing that they would not be conquered?

Read [Lamentations 5](#), the only chapter that is not an acrostic. It is written as the author's prayer to God.

19. In this prayer what did the author ask God to do? How did he end his prayer?

It seems to me that the book of Lamentations is a great picture of what true grief looks like. There are times of immense sorrow when tears and heaviness are our companions ([Lam. 1:1--3:20](#)). We turn to God and hope revives ([Lam. 3:21-33](#)), but grief isn't over and begins to invade our hearts once again ([Lam. 3:34--4:22](#)). Even when we pray, we pray out of both hope and despair ([Lam. 5](#)).

20. *Sharing question:* Share about a period of grief in your life and how it parallels this description. If you have never experienced this kind of grief, write down what you have seen in the lives of others.

21. *Responding to God:* Write a prayer about a difficult situation in your life right now. Write out specifically what is happening and how you feel, just as the author of Lamentations did in the final chapter.

Day Five Study

Read [Psalm 77](#). The psalmist deals with his feelings of depression. Although he does not give the causes, his feelings are very similar to those reflected in Lamentations.

Diamonds in the Word: Outline this psalm.

22. Describe the psalmist's feelings.

23. How does the psalmist show faith in God in the midst of feeling abandoned and forgotten?

24. What parallels do you see in this psalm to the book of Lamentations?

25. *Sharing question:* The NET Bible translation of [Psalm 77:6c](#) says this: "I tried to make sense of what was happening." This is when faith gets tricky, because we are not always able to do so. Share about a time in your life when you tried to make sense of what was happening but could not. How did you keep faith alive?

26. *Responding to God:* Write your own short psalm based on the outline of this one. Just write a line or two on each subject. Begin with a cry to God; write about your true feelings about a difficult situation that you experienced at some point; lay out your questions before God; and then list some of His great deeds.

We have two stories again this week. Both deal with difficult situations where women cried out to God, knowing that He alone could help. He was truly an anchor for their souls in extremely trying times, when they were so low they could not go on without Him. In all such situations, we deal not only with the struggle of the situations, but we also deal with the grief of loss.

Denise's Story

We went through a very difficult time with our son. He had to be in control of everything. He would rage and meltdown frequently. Our family was in shambles because of the instability of his moods – fine when things were good and TERRIBLE when things were bad. In searching for answers, we tried medication which helped in the day, but at night it was like letting loose a spring that had been held down for a long time. The Lord led us to a woman, a believer, who had experience in this area and worked with us to do a home-based intensive therapy. In this type of therapy, the child learns that the parent is in charge, and he (the child) is not in charge, and this actually builds closeness and attachment. We had intense time together with no outside activities. And it was incredibly stressful as we worked through the rebellion that comes with this kind of a shift. I did not sleep well and would often wake up at 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning, unable to go back to sleep.

One morning about two weeks into the program, after having a terrible night's sleep, I rose early alone and went outside. I truly did not know how I was going to make it through the day. I was wasted before it began. I felt that my well was totally dry; I had nothing left to give. As I prayed, He graciously gave me the passage from [John 4:14](#), where Jesus tells the woman at the well that He is the Living Water. I knew that His strength, His Living Water would carry me through the day. And He did.

A week or so later the Lord was also immediately there in a time of despair. I went to church alone, one of the few times I got out of the house in the week, and my husband stayed home. It felt good to be refreshed by the songs of praise and words of encouragement in the sermon. But when I got home, things were falling apart and had been raging for almost two hours. My heart sank as I cried out to the Lord, not knowing how to pray. But the Holy Spirit brought to my mind the verse that He intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words ([Romans 8:26](#)). The Lord took over again. I knew I could trust Him to work this together for His good.

The Lord had prepared me for this time by leading me to begin memorizing [James 1](#) before the troubles even began. "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him." Time after time I have seen His faithfulness. He is the rock. And He is always there. He promises to never leave us or forsake us.

We are still on the journey. He encourages us in Isaiah that those who WAIT ON THE LORD (emphasis mine) will renew their strength . . . We are waiting on the Lord and finding Him faithful and He is and will be glorified by His mighty works.

Jennifer's Story

I was diagnosed with colon cancer at the age of 32. I had 3 children under the age of 5. My tumor was too big to remove, so I did chemo and radiation before surgery. After my body recovered, I had surgery to remove what was left of the tumor and the surrounding lymph nodes. I then started more chemo in hopes of killing any cancer that might still be growing in my body! I had to have a temporary colostomy bag for 3 months so that the area where the tumor had been could heal. Then, I had surgery again to "put me back together." Things were fine for about 2 weeks until I started having intense cramping and vomiting. The area where surgery #2 took place had filled with scar tissue and nothing was passing through. At 7 weeks post-surgery, I went back in for my 3rd surgery.

My oncologist said that there was no way that my body could handle another round of chemo. He said in the "big picture" it wouldn't make much of a difference. For now, I have to recover from this surgery, give my body time to start working again, and gain weight. (Never thought I would hear those orders from a doctor!)

One thing that I have been reminded of in all of this is that God is good—REGARDLESS. God is good—regardless of whether or not my cancer comes back. God is good—regardless of

whether all of our prayers are answered the way I want them to be. God is good—no matter what He chooses to do, whether this is the end of my cancer battle or just the beginning. So many blessings have come from the past 9 1/2 months. I know that God is sovereign, and He is still on His throne! Of course, I hope this is the end of my cancer. I will just take it one day at a time. God has a plan—this did not take Him by surprise. I am honored to be a part of His plan, and I will do my best to honor Him no matter what that plan is.

I have been so humbled during this time just knowing that the God of the universe is concerned about me. I have never felt more loved and more cherished than I have in the last 9 months. God certainly has bigger issues to deal with than me, and yet, I have felt like I was just sitting in the palm of His hand this whole time.

It has definitely been a trying time. Like with any trial, no one truly understands unless they have been there. A friend, whose husband has battled cancer for nearly 10 years, summed it up best when she said, "Even on your best days, it is still so hard." This has been the hardest 9 months of my life. I am so blessed to have a wonderful husband, family and friends to carry me and help me through this. On my lowest days, someone would unexpectedly brighten my day in one way or another.

There isn't a "thank you note" big enough for all others have done! I have been bathed in love and kindness. I never thought joy and blessings would come from cancer, but they did. It was not always easy to be on the receiving end of it all; it is much easier to help than to just accept it yourself. But, I have been so blessed.

When I was first diagnosed, I told Jeff, "It is time for God to show up and show off," and He certainly did that!!!!